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ABSTRACT

This study compares teachers' perceptions of Chinese American child rearing practices with the perceptions of Chinese American parents. The sample populations consisted of teachers from the Houston area and Chinese immigrant parents from Los Angeles and Houston. A questionnaire solicited opinions on five topics: (1) whether American child rearing practices are better than Chinese; (2) whether Chinese American parents tend to be liberal or authoritarian; (3) whether Chinese American children should be completely Americanized; (4) whether Chinese American children perceive that their parents have high academic expectations; and (5) whether Chinese American parents should tell their children about Chinese customs. Results showed that both groups did not perceive American child rearing practices to be superior to Chinese practices. Chinese parents perceived themselves to be more liberal, less apt to expect academic achievement, and less willing to teach their children about Chinese culture than teachers perceived Chinese parents to be. Teachers who had been enrolled in multicultural courses tended to have a greater understanding of Chinese child rearing practices than did teachers who had not been exposed to the multicultural viewpoint. (Author/BE)

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School Teacher's Perception of Child-Rearing by the Chinese

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The multicultural determinants in learning have gradually been recognized by educators since the early 1970s. It is assumed that school teachers have a better opportunity to contact culturally different learners than do most other professionals. Therefore, it is essential that teachers acquire an understanding of the cultural factors which influence learners' behavior and learning results in the classroom. However, the complicated relationships among ethnic backgrounds, environmental factors, and learning achievements need to be determined through more empirical studies as well as more reliable and objective observations. In our culturally pluralistic society, all ethnic groups should be considered when educators are exploring any cultural factors and problems associated with schooling. The increase in the U.S. Asian population which contributed to the influx of immigrants since 1968 calls for more research studies dealing with Asian Americans.

The child-rearing techniques practiced by Asian American parents at home are one of the cultural factors often causing concern among teachers. Child-rearing techniques are formed by both the value system of an ethnic group and the social environment in which a family exists. Since Asian Americans differ from the Anglo majority in race, history, language, religion and demographic variables, they merit special study. In this paper, the conception of Chinese child-rearing as perceived by school teachers is examined together with Chinese immigrants' own perception of child-rearing.

Since China stems from an ancient civilization, the value systems demonstrated by her people are usually considered to be conservative by Westerners. The traditional, formal interpersonal relationships emphasized by Confucianism have played a vital role in Chinese child-rearing practices. Compared with modern Western societies, Chinese child-rearing techniques are perceived by Western scholars as rigid and authoritarian. Frequently, such scholars overlook social changes in China as experienced by the Chinese people and the process of rapid assimilation experienced by Chinese immigrants in the U.S. Both social changes and assimilation have great impact upon contemporary Chinese child-rearing techniques. Such an impact, however, has not been recognized by school teachers who work with Chinese American children. While Chinese immigrant parents try very hard to assimilate into the mainstream (Yao, 1979a) by modifying their child-rearing practices, some school teachers still expect traditional child-rearing skills to be practiced at home. Undoubtedly, such a potential discrepancy in the conception of Chinese child-rearing creates an inconsistency in discipline and contributes to behavioral problems (Dobson, 1974, Mussen, Conger and Kagan, 1979). Eventually, the relationship between schools and families will be negatively affected.

In order to determine the possible discrepancy between the school teachers' conception of Chinese child-rearing and those of the Chinese immigrant parents, it is hypothesized that teachers and parents do have a different perception. With the recent emphasis on multicultural education, it is also hypothesized that those teachers who have had multicultural courses have a better understanding of Chinese child-rearing.

Method

One hundred and fifty-four school teachers representing diverse school districts around the Houston area were selected. More than half of them (59%) are parents themselves and 61% of them claimed to have contacts with Chinese. Two-thirds of them are elementary school teachers while the rest are in secondary education. Among the selected teachers, 36% of them have previously taken a multicultural course. The sample of 82 Chinese immigrant parents was selected from the telephone directories of Los Angeles and Houston.

Five questions relating to the general conception of Chinese child-rearing were asked on an extensive questionnaire and were answered by all. The last question was stated in a slightly different form for the school teachers than for the Chinese parents as shown below:

1. Are American child-rearing methods better than Chinese?
2. As far as child-rearing is concerned, do you think Chinese American parents lean toward being authoritarian or libertal?
3. Chinese American children should be completely Americanized.
4. Chinese American children perceive that their parents have high academic expectations.
5. a. Teacher
   Chinese American parents should tell their children about Chinese customs.

   b. Parents
   You explain Chinese customs to your child.

Results and Discussion

Although slightly more than half (56%) of the sample agreed that American child-rearing techniques are no better than those of the Chinese, 31% of the selected teachers had no idea of such a comparison. However, the results also reveal that no statistical difference in the comparison of Chinese and American child rearing was found between the teachers and parents as analyzed by chi-square ($X^2_{0.001} = 8.76$ with df = 2). The findings imply that school teachers respect Chinese child-rearing and place a high value on it. Meanwhile. Chinese parents (68%) are also proud of their Chinese child-rearing and are not in favor of the type of child-rearing commonly observed in the U.S.

However, when a definition of Chinese child-rearing is sought, school teachers and parents had different attitudes ($X^2_{0.001} = 46.35$ with df = 3). Surprisingly, only 4% of the teachers selected believed that Chinese parents are liberal in child-rearing, while 32% of the parents claimed to be. Further analyses were conducted by comparing Chinese parents with teachers who had taken multicultural course(s) and teachers who had not. It is interesting to point out that there is no difference between the groups of teachers who had multicultural course(s) and those who did not have multicultural course(s) ($X^2_{0.001} = 8.02$ with df =2). On the other hand, significant differences were found between the parents and the groups of teachers; the difference between the parents and teachers with multicultural course(s) experience was determined by a chi-square value of 19.64, while $X^2_{0.001} = 29.54$ was found between parents and teachers with no such course(s) experience. The results suggest that Chinese parents and school teachers have a different conception of the parental role in discipline. The relatively high percentage of Chinese parents who identified themselves as liberals can be explained by two forces experienced by the Chinese parents: external and internal. Externally speaking, Chinese people have imitated the social mode of the Western countries since the founding of the Republic in 1911. Although the influence of Western culture and social change has during the past three decades had a varying degree of impact upon Chinese social institutions and development of technology; nevertheless, the trends in industrialization and Westernization are fact and have been recognized as such by the Chinese public in general. Along with Westernization and modernization, Chinese family structure and child-rearing techniques have been changing simultaneously. Parenting has been affected tremendously by Western behavioral scientists through the mass media (translated into Chinese). As a result, parents have either gradually changed their parenting to become more liberal and permissive or prefer to be identified as having done so. In some people's mind, authoritarian or conservative parenting means being "out of date" in a modern society. Internally, on the other hand, Chinese parents tend to compare their own childhood with their children's, including child discipline. Thirty or forty years ago, Chinese children did not have as much freedom as children do nowadays. In contrast to their own early experiences with their parents, some present-day Chinese immigrant parents consider themselves liberal with their children. Consequently, Chinese parents define the pattern of their parenting in accordance with experiences of Westernization and discipline which they received in early childhood. Yet, the influence of such external and internal forces which have shaped Chinese parenting patterns is often ignored by school teachers as revealed by this study. School teachers perceived that the authoritarian child-rearing technique is still practiced by Chinese immigrant parents. Even those teachers who had multicultural courses are no exception. Thus, it is believed that Asian American children and their ethnic heritages are frequently neglected in the content of multicultural courses at the college level. It is suggested that multicultural courses should enrich college students' knowledge not only of the heritages and problems of Blacks, American Indians, and Hispanic Americans but also of Asian Americans. Even though school teachers do respect Chinese child-rearing the lack of understanding of the Chinese parental role is evident.

Besides the pattern of parenting, parental expectations are also studied in this research. Parental expectations are considered to be one of the determinants in child-rearing.

Asian children have been portrayed by the American public, including teachers, as somewhat submissive, obedient and highly motivated in learning as a result of high parental expectations. However, the results of this study point out that only 58.5% of the Chinese parents agree with such a generalization. It is interesting to note that 25% of the parents had no idea of the parental expectations perceived by their children. There are two possible explanations for this outcome. First, Chinese parents are not aware of placing parental pressure upon thier children. Compared with the amount of classroom activities and homework load a China-educated Chinese child has, American children are lucky indeed. Therefore, according to the Chinese parents' standards, their offspring have an easy time as students. Secondly, like most immigrants, Chinese parents are preoccupied with life's struggle in the U.S. and are less sensitive to the pressure they transmit to their youngsters. Their conscious strife generates an unconscious high expectation of the next generation (Yao, 1979b). On the other hand, school teachers were found to have a different viewpoint. The significant difference ($X^2_{0.001} = 17.42$) was found between parents and teachers who did not have multicultural training. The difference between parents and the teachers who had taken multicultural course(s) was not significant ($X^2_{0.001} = 7.99$). The finding implies that teachers with a background in multicultural education share the parents' perceptions of parental expectations of Chinese American children. In other words, the teachers who had had multicultural course(s) had a better understanding of Chinese parental expectation of their children's academic achievement than those teachers who had not had course(s).

Even though a majority of both the teachers (71%) and the parents (66%) disagreed on the point that Chinese American children should be completely Americanized, there was a high percentage (34%) of Chinese parents who were neutral about this question. Meanwhile, 25% of the teachers who did not have multicultural course(s) and 9% of those who did also shared the same response. The findings suggest that some Chinese parents had a very positive attitude toward Amerianization including child-rearing techniques. Such a positive attitude can be attributed to the varying degree of assimilation into American society by Chinese immigrants. Teachers, on the contrary, with multicultural course(s) overwhelmingly (90%) believed that Chinese American children should not be Americanized. Additional discussion on the background of the parents' responses will be presented after the explanation of the fifth question.

The question regarding transmitting Chinese customs to Chinese American children was stated differently for parents and teachers. The selected Chinese parents were asked what they had actually practiced, while the teachers were asked only about their general opnion. A large majority of the teachers (91%) believed that Chinese parents should tell their children about Chinese customs. As expected, a higher percentage (96%) of the teachers who had multicultural course(s) agreed with this item. On the other hand, only 18% of the parents stated that they had initiated such teaching or had put any effort into cultural transmission. More than half of the parents (63%) pointed out that they only discussed Chinese customs with their children wher the opportunity arose. The rest of the parents (19%) stated that they seldom shared their knowledge of Chinese culture with their children.

Yet, it is still encouraging to find that school teachers had a positive attitude toward learning about the Chinese heritage. Evidently, multicultural awareness is spreading among school teachers who had a great influence on children's early schooling and personality formation (Funk and Olberg, 1974). Nevertheless, the findings imply that Chinese parents lacked enthusiasm in teaching Chinese culture to the next generation. This halfheartedness may be attributed to their positive attitude toward rapid assimilation into the mainstream. They are no different than other immigrants who exert themsleves for better adjustment, economic gain, and social mobility. They are even willing to give up their traditional lifestyle and value system in exchange for social acceptance in the promised land. In addition, they have been deprived of learning more about American education and school activities because of the language barrier and/or long working hours. Consequently, there is a gap in

educational issues and philosophy between school teachers and Chinese parents. It is firmly believed that multicultural courses are not merely for teachers but also for parents who are both givers and receivers in the process of multicultural education. Parents need to be informed of the educators' changing attitudes toward minority children and of the concept of cultural pluralism in education. They are no longer required to abandon their cultural heritage while they are in the process of fulfilling their dreams in a culturally diverse nation. School teachers can assist immigrant parents to recognize their role in the education process and the educational implications of a pluralistic society.

Conclusion

Although there are significant differences in the impressions of Chinese parenting between school teachers and Chinese parents, school teachers overall have demonstrated a positive attitude toward Chinese child-rearing. Such a positive attitude, undoubtedly, will compensate for the lack of understanding of the Chinese parenting pattern. Most importantly, teachers who have had multicultural courses were shown in this study to exhibit positive attitudes toward minority groups. Unfortunately, on the other hand, Chinese parents were not aware of the recent emphasis on multicultural education. As a result, some of them displayed skepticism about attempts to preserve Chinese culture and Chinese child-rearing techniques in the U.S. Their attitude towards assimilation may therein be reflected.

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